

'Aborting America'

Author Nathanson Said What He Felt He Must

Reviewed by Jeanne D. Sweeney

Aborting America, Doubleday, 1979, by Bernard N. Nathanson, MD, with Richard N. Ostling, one of the recent books generated by the abortion issue, is decidedly unusual because of its author. Dr. Nathanson, an obstetrician-gynecologist, was the only physician among the handful of activists who founded the National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws in the late 1960s. They successfully lobbied for the removal of laws protecting the unborn in New York State and elsewhere.

He then became director of the largest abortion clinic in the world. However, in November 1974, Nathanson published an article titled "Deeper into Abortion" in the New England Journal of Medicine in which he stated, "I am deeply troubled by my own increasing certainty that I had, in fact, presided over 60,000 deaths. . . . We are taking life, and the deliberate taking of life, even of a special order and under special circumstances, is an inexpressibly serious matter."

Nathanson traces his natural rebelliousness to his father's "chutzpah" which he described as the obsessive drive and irrepressible courage of a young Jewish male born into overweening poverty within a Gentile world in the last century. He tells us, "My father undermined religiosity in me so continually and so artfully that I was left with nothing to believe in. Consequently, I am not only a convinced atheist, but have never been particularly interested in organized religion."

He describes the experience of procuring an abortion for his girlfriend while in medical school. He shares his Ob-Gyn residency experiences, caring for poor patients suffering from the effects of infected abortions, contrasted with the hospital

abortion of private patients, performed under the guise of spontaneous miscarriages. This contradiction drew him to conclude that the laws preventing abortion were unfair and should be changed. After his happenstance meeting with writer and activist Lawrence Lader, he quickly found himself willingly ensnared in plotting the social revolution to change the abortion laws.

Undoubtedly many will be uneasy with his revelations about the development of the VARAL strategy, the decision to make the Catholic hierarchy the whipping boy of the issue, the role of Rev. Howard Moody's Clergy Consultation Service and the questionable medical practices of so-called respectable abortionists commonly used for referrals.

On one hand, this section may prove helpful to future writers piecing together the historical facts of this social phenomenon, but it might also tweak the consciences of those who jumped on the bandwagon of easy abortion to help women out of what they judged a difficult situation. It was the late Summer of 1972 before Nathanson began to be bothered by the weekly abortion body counts given at staff meetings.

While Aborting America is Nathanson's testimony to his personal discovery of the value of the unborn's life, his solutions to the problems of conflicts arising between the choice of the unborn's life or the health and convenience of others appear inconsistent. Although he repeatedly discloses instances of the misuse of medical technology, he suggests that more technology might solve the problems. He complains about those who use "the specious arguments against abortion" (which he frequently distorts), only to use their arguments when he rebuts the "specious arguments in favor of abortion."

Nathanson has contributed to the important writing on this issue. He is on target in his critique of the Supreme Court's 1973 abortion decision. He will anger some proponents and fail to satisfy many anti-abortionists. But he has said what he felt he had to say. He may fall short of our expectations, but his may be a voice crying out in the wilderness that some will hear.

Women in the Church Subject of Conference

Washington (RNS)— Sexism and patriarchy were among the key issues explored at the first meeting between the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Committee on Women in the Church and in Society and the Women's Ordination Conference.

Fidelity within a renewing church was another issue discussed along with the understanding of woman as an image of God and the centrality of this to understanding woman as person, according to participants who issued a joint statement.

The relationship between woman's struggle in the church and her struggle in society received considerable attention when the two groups met near here recently in the first session of a planned "official dialogue."

The purpose of the dialogue was to "discover, understand and promote the full potential of woman as person in the life of the church." Those at the meeting examined the relationship between the view of "person" in church documents and the experience of women in the life of the church.

Bishop Michael F. McAuliffe of Jefferson City, Mo. is chairman of the bishops' committee. Sister Elizabeth Carroll, RSM, vice president of the Sisters of Mercy of Pittsburgh, presented a paper on "The Lived Experience of Women in the Church."

Participants from both

groups described the dialogue atmosphere as "open, with a sense of seeking the truth together." Sister Joan Sobala, a member of the ministerial team in the Rochester, N.Y., headquarters of the Women's Ordination Conference, declined to expand on the joint statement, which she noted was "prepared with great care by both groups."

It is planned to continue the dialogue in the Spring.

Bishop Hickey To Lead Holy Hour

A series of Holy Hours have been scheduled by the Peoples Eucharistic League, Holy Trinity Chapter.

The first will take place at Our Lady of Mercy Motherhouse on Monday, Jan. 14, with Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey the leader. All the Holy Hours will take place from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. The Holy Hours will take place three times a month, through June, and will be scheduled at one of three places — the Mercy Motherhouse, the Sisters of St. Joseph Infirmary, or Holy Trinity Church in Webster.

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

The Role Of the Family

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 2:41-52; (R1) Sir. 3:2-6, 12-14; (R2) Col. 3:12-21.

Next Sunday is the feast of the Holy Family. The year 1980 has been designated as the year of the family. John Paul II has decided that the next Synod of Bishops should study "The Christian Role of the Family in the Modern World."



Fr. Shamon Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World.

The family in general has a basic role in society. But the Synod is not so much concerned with this, but with the role of the Christian family. The Christian family, because it is Christian, has a special role in the modern world. This role boils down to one word: evangelization — that is, bringing the Good News into all strata of society, transforming it from within, thereby making it new. To do this, the Christian family must be active on three levels, educational, spiritual and social.

The family is the first seat of education. Parents are the first and foremost educators of their children. But the Christian family educates its children for a life beyond this earth. "A true education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his final goal." Recent developments, however, have made it hard for the Christian family to fulfill its educative role. Government schools are secularistic. Parents must therefore play an ever-greater part in the direction of schools. Families too must band together and be helped to see that television, radio and

movies put on programs inoffensive to the morality and faith of their children. Parents must share more and more in the work of catechesis. They should be active in the sacramental programs — confession, communion, confirmation — of their children, in CCD programs, in pre-baptismal instruction. And young people should be trained as soon as possible to become educators themselves. The young are talented, creative and generous!

Secondly, the family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. It is the guardian of great social virtues and values. But the Christian family has the further mission of sanctifying its members. In the sacrament of marriage Christ encounters Christian couples and consecrates them to a life of love, perpetual fidelity and mutual self-bestowal. By creating a family atmosphere of love and reverence for God and men, parents foster their children's holiness (R2). The Christian family, therefore, must be a praying family. It should raise up vocations to the priesthood, to religious life, to missionary work and to the lay apostolate. Parents themselves must be chaste; and parenthood responsible (not planned), observing the ethical order regarding the honorable performance of the generative role.

Finally, the family is the cell of society. Cell, because society is only a collectivity of families. Cell, because the health of the whole social body depends on the moral and spiritual health of the family. As the constituent element of society, the family pre-exists society. Therefore it enjoys rights independent of society. Rights that society must respect and safeguard, such as the right to privacy, the right to procreate, the right to determine the number of children; especially today,

society must safeguard public morality, the true nature of marriage and the family, and domestic prosperity.

The future of families depends in large measure on the decisions taken by national leaders and international communities. Families and family associations therefore must be prepared to intervene in national and international initiatives that try to give answers to family problems.

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To sum up, the threefold role of the Christian family, educationwise, spiritually and socially, is to make a holy family. The family of Nazareth has blessed the world, precisely because it was a holy family.

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